



March 1, 2023

Leslie Blatteau

New Haven Federation of Teachers

- Support: SB 1093 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CONCERNING EDUCATION.
- Oppose: SB 1096 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CHARTER SCHOOL APPROVAL PROCESS.
- Support: HB 6763 AN ACT CONCERNING AN AUDIT OF THE STATE-WIDE MASTERY EXAMINATION.

Good evening Senator McCorry, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and Members of the Education Committee. My name is Leslie Blatteau and I'm a teacher, parent, and resident in New Haven. I am the President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, a union representing over 1700 educators in New Haven Public Schools. I am an At-Large Vice President of AFT-CT, a 30,000 member statewide union representing 10,000 teachers and educators in CT. NHFT and AFT-CT belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

First, I would like to express my support for the lower class sizes outlined in SB 1093 because all students in Connecticut deserve smaller class sizes. While some legislators are concerned about funding this proposal, I want to remind this committee that our state has a multibillion-dollar surplus and an overflowing Rainy Day Fund. Lowering class sizes for every child is well within our reach. In New Haven, where we are a proud sanctuary city educating primarily Black and Brown students, we welcome students into our classrooms and schools at all points throughout the school year. This means a class size that might be around 20 in October, ends up being 26 or

27, in March. We know what this means on the ground, in the classroom, for students and teachers. This is an issue of racial and economic justice and we must do more at the state level to ensure that educational equity is prioritized.

There are also numerous studies in a policy brief by Class Size Matters that highlight the benefits to lower class sizes. These benefits are related to improved student academic performance, student engagement, graduation rates, college persistence, school culture and climate, teacher morale, and teacher retention.

- Smaller classes have been found to have a positive impact on school climate, student socio-emotional growth, safety and suspension rates, parent engagement, and teacher attrition, especially in schools that serve low income families.
- Finn et al (2005) found that four years of a small class in K–3 improved the odds of graduating from high school by about 80%.
- Dynarski et al (2013) concluded that smaller classes significantly increased the probability of a student attending college, earning a college diploma, and earning degrees in a STEM field (science, technology, engineering, or mathematics).
- Bascia (2010) summarized the impacts of class size reduction, noting that teachers were able to interact with individual students more frequently and use a greater variety of instructional and differentiated strategies. Students were more engaged and less disruptive in the classroom.
- A report from the Pennsylvania State Education Association (2008) noted that smaller classes improved teacher morale, which translates into higher rates of teacher attendance, reduced costs for substitute teachers and less teacher attrition.

Second, I would like to raise concerns about SB 1096 - An Act Concerning the Charter School Approval Process. Instead of shifting funds away from our public schools to fast-track the creation of new charter schools, this legislature first and foremost should fully fund and fully staff our schools where students already attend and need support. We have a democratic process in place, where elected representatives approve school funding as part of a public process. I am concerned that we are considering taking that democratic oversight away from the public and our elected representatives. Why give up your legislative authority to an unelected group of political appointees? In the name of accountability, transparency, equity, and democracy, and to ensure that public school students have access to educational programs with true public oversight, I urge you to reconsider this bill. (See below for specific recommendations regarding charter schools accountability).*

Lastly, as a classroom teacher who collaborates with colleagues to design performance based assessments that not only align with the developmental needs of my students, but also prepare them for college and career, and build off their intellectual curiosity and personal strengths, I would like to express my support for HB 6763. Given the amount of time and money that is spent on screen-based, developmentally-inappropriate, deficit-focused test preparation, rather than investing in engaging, project-based, interdisciplinary preparation for life, an audit of statewide testing and its related costs is long-overdue. We have concrete examples here in CT, as well as in New York and Massachusetts, about how we can assess our students in ways that promote student engagement and bring the joy back to teaching and learning. Please pass this bill and consider establishing a pilot program to move engaging and innovative assessment strategies forward. Performance based assessment is a necessary tool in our tool kit as we work to re-engage our learning communities, ensuring vibrant schools where youth voice and critical thinking are prioritized.

Thank you,
Leslie Blatteau
New Haven, CT

*The legislature has failed to introduce our **CHARTER SCHOOL TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY**, which would do the following:

Sec. 1 – Parity in Special Education and SBE Accountability – Makes special education statutes (10-76d – 10-76k) and SBE accountability (10-4b) statutes applicable to Charter Schools. (see also Secs. 6 & 14).

Sec. 2 – Addressing pushouts of students – Prevents charter school operators from pushing students out of charter schools by mirroring similar language and intent in magnet school statutes.

Sec. 3 – Student Exit Interviews – Addressing pushouts of students

1. Requires charter school to conduct exit interviews of students/parents/guardians to determine whether the student has been pushed out or otherwise dissuaded from attending the charter school.
2. Requires SDE to create a reporting template and to report aggregate results for each school.
3. Requires SDE to create a process for reports of unequal treatment by charter schools and steps to remediate concerns.

Sec. 4 – Local Impact of New Charter Schools – Requires approval of new charters to include an impact analysis of the school's operation on the local school district.

Sec. 5 – End Special Waivers from Statute – Phase out charter schools' waivers from statute, except existing enrollment cap waivers.

Sec. 6 – Parity in Special Education, Transportation, and Other Budget Practices –makes charter schools responsible for special education and transportation costs of its students.

Sec. 7 – Funds for Classrooms – Prohibit use of public funds to advertise for charter school student recruitment.

Sec. 8 – Equity in Student Waitlists and Admissions Lotteries – Addresses barriers to equity by prohibiting practices like requiring parents to volunteer or attend school functions or to advise students against applying due to lack of resources to support special education or EL students.

Sec. 9 – Student attrition – Requires charter schools to submit data on the number of Special Education and ELs relative to the local school district and the number of students entering grade 9 who graduated four years later.

Sec. 10 –Transparency in Student Enrollment – Changes SDE biannual reporting on charter schools to include recommendations for legislation to promote oversight, transparency and accountability, prevent drop-out and attrition, reduce racial isolation. Adds to charter school profile reports trends toward reducing racial isolation, mobility, voluntary and involuntary exits, matched student cohort graduation rates, suspensions/expulsions, donors of donations in excess of \$1,000 per year.

Sec. 11 – CMOs transparency – Requires detailed reporting of charter schools’ contracts with operators, including expenditures and associated costs.

Sec. 12 – Public Meeting and Transparency –

1. Requires online posting of charter school’s handbook, discipline codes, policies, budgets, donations, advertising expenditures, CMO fees, contracts.
2. Requires fair and publicly posted disciplinary policy and code of conduct, including student due process rights, prohibitions against assessing of fines or demerits leading to suspensions or expulsions and against punitive measures that demean or humiliate students.
3. Requires for any student withdrawing from the school signed attestation indicating the reason for withdrawal and whether it was voluntary and whether school personnel discouraged the student from continued enrollment, with aggregate results reported to the state.
4. Requires charter schools to provide plain language descriptions of teachers’ due process rights under CGS 10-151.

Sec. 13 – FOIA and CMOs – Extends FOI provisions to CMOs, including donor information unless a contributor requests his or her name be redacted (limited to 3 years from the year of the donation).

Sec. 14 – SBE Accountability (10-4b) – Specifically includes Charter Schools in Sec. 10-4b to ensure SBE accountability over charter schools.

Sec. 15 – Certification parity – Ends the provision permitting a school to open with up to 50% of its teachers without suitable certification. Reduces the percentage of non-certified teachers who can serve in roles requiring certification from 30% to 5%, provided they obtain a Charter School Teaching Permit.